

POWDER POINT HALL

By Allison Arnold

In my childhood summers in Duxbury, I remember Powder Point Hall as a large yellow wooden building where the Sailors' Snug Harbor later stood. But it took an old friend of mine, Mrs. Elmer E. Gray of Brookline, to make the Hall real to me. She spent summers there in the early 1900s and told me about it when I visited her in Brookline. Her recollections interested me so much I'm sure there are many others who would like to share them. Here they are as she told them:

The increase of summer boarders in the early 1900s played no small part in the changes on Powder Point. Many of them lured by the informality of life in Duxbury, bought land and built substantial houses in that area. The primitive old structure known as Powder Point Hall and its adjacent houses, designated as The Cottage and Grove House, accommodated many families with children ranging from one year through teen-agers and a bit older.

As most of these families returned year after year, the youngsters enjoyed all of the activities en masse. Sons and daughters of Point residents joined with the group at the Hall, as all the sports were centered there. At that time there was no golf club nor commodious yacht club and few tennis courts. So the 9-hole golf course at the rear and at one side of the Hall in the large open field, the tennis courts on the other side, and space enough for baseball games, focused the chief land activities around this circumscribed area.

However, none of these sports

was permitted on Sundays in the early 1900s. Golfers were then comparatively few, but tennis matches were popular, and enthusiastic spectators sat on long wooden benches under the fine old trees. Games were usually planned when low tide made bathing or sailing impossible. There was swimming on the beach in front of the hall or from the old wharf nearby.

Bathing costumes for women and girls were the full, knee-length skirt and the high-necked bodice with elbow length sleeves, worn over full bloomers with long black stockings. The material was usually black or dark blue serge. One day a highly respected woman had the temerity to walk to the shore for her swim minus her stockings, causing gasps of amazement.

Feminine attire in those days was long and full as to skirt, and high as to neckline. The most approved costume for young girls was the "Peter Thompson" and so conservative was the thought at that time than when a little girl of 12 arrived wearing full pleated bloomers of Kahaki for play, she was looked upon askance by mothers who disapproved of such freedom.

Sailing popular

Sailing was always a popular sport, but regulated by the tide, and as the boats were small, the groups of young people were divided. A sail to Plymouth for an ice-cream soda at Cooper's drugstore was a favorite pastime. Occasionally, disregard of time or an ebbing tide caused delay in the return of the sailing parties, who were finally greeted by anxious and reproachful mothers, particularly after 10 p.m., as late



This picture, lent by Anna Benedict Millar, was taken about 1890. The first lady on the left is her grandmother, Anna Coffin who married Edward Elms. The third one is Laura Coffin, her great-aunt.

hours were not permitted.

Walking was also popular and at low tide Long Beach offered extended possibilities. An asset of Powder Point Hall was the thickly wooded grove where hammocks were closely hung in every available space. With the addition of porch chairs this made a delightful outdoors setting. Lack of comfortable rooms in which to sit in the Hall, made the grove attractive to all ages in good weather, until nightfall when the onslaught of mosquitoes sent everyone to cover.

Naturally, the more active sports were for the youthful element, but older matrons engaged in card parties or costume parties for which prizes

were given. From Stowells came a steamer trunk full of fascinating and suitable articles for prizes, and it was taken at once to the room of the leading spirit where a favored few were permitted a private inspection.

Croquet Popular

Among the older group there were 6-8 ladies who found croquet absorbing, and the jovial son of one of the members would shout, "There goes the varsity!" when the contestants came into view. The balls and mallets were the personal property of the players and were promptly taken to their rooms at the end of the game so no one else had an opportunity to play croquet.

Occasionally, when the tide and

weather were favorable, this group went for a sail with an old Duxbury captain who had the reputation of being cautious even to reefing his flag. Not to be outdone by the teenagers, a trip to the Marshfield Fair with Eben Briggs in the horse-drawn barge was another attraction. The ladies wore white shirtwaists and long white pique skirts set off by wide Kelley green silk belts (as suggested by Vogue that year, along with other fashion magazines), topped by white duck hats. Parasols completed the costumes.

"King Caesar's" kitchen was often used by congenial groups, and others with friends in the

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stately old houses enjoyed cordial hospitality in simple ways, though afternoon teas were not the fashion then. To those who recall the horse and buggy age, the large open fields now criss-crossed by roads with new houses on them, are an amazing change. But expansion is the urge of the present age and with the increasing number of automobiles and cocktail parties, the tempo of life is speeded up in the once quiet old town of Duxbury to a degree undreamed of in the early 1900s.

An early evening stroll to Peterson's drugstore for a soda was a diversion, and an agreeable one, as no automobiles were in use in those peaceful early 1900s. No artificial stimulant was needed by the gay young groups setting out for the Marshfield Fair. The girls wore their prettiest summer gowns with large hats trimmed with huge ribbon bows, and were escorted by youths wearing white trousers, blue coats and straw hats.

The badly ventilated gym in the Hall, which was the Powder Point School for Boys in the winter, was the gathering place on rainy days

and the piano was in constant use for chorus singing and sometimes for fine music. The gym was also used for cards or costume parties and for the informal Saturday night dances. The room was always crowded with dancers and spectators and being lighted by oil lamps with reflectors, became an inferno before the evening ended.

But the piano music gave the dancers a gay time and many of the younger married couples showed the waltz was poetry of motion. In spite of the lack of many creature comforts, the popularity of the Hall never

diminished, as an excellent and abundant table gave great satisfaction.

Oil lamps lit all the rooms regardless of fire risks, and a bowl and pitcher of water in each provided the only means of indoor bathing. But prices at that time were only 15 or 16 dollars per

week per person. The old Hall burned one cold winter night and the more modern building was erected in keeping with the times. Gradually the changes began, romances budded, college claimed many of the happy group, and finally that era passed into history.